Provision of landline connections

2487. SHRI TARINI KANTA ROY: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the total number of people who have applied for landline connections and are awaiting it:

(b) the reasons behind the delay in installing the landline telephones; and

(c) the steps that are being taken to expedite the process?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) The total number of people who are awaiting telephone connections from Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) as on 31.01.2005 are 1758961.

(b) Most of the waiting list is in rural, remote and far-flung areas. To cover such areas deployment of huge cable/WLL/GSM network is to be laid for which substantial investment in needed.

(c) BSNL and MTNL are committed to provide connections to its wait-listed customers *inter-alia*, through the following measures.

(i) Large scale deployment of WLL network in rural areas has been planned.

(ii) Relaxation of the outdoor cable norms of 2.5 Kms to 5.0 Kms for Landline Exchanges.

(iii) Mobile network in all the highways, important towns, pilgrim centers and State highways are deployed to give coverage to large parts of rural areas as well.

In addition to the efforts made by BSNL and MTNL, the demand for telephones is met by the private operators also, further, financial support is provided to the telecom operators through the mechanism of Universal Service Obligation Fund to encourage them, *inter-alia*, to provide phones in rural areas.